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THE SUNDAY AGE
AGENDA

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'I'll do this very quickly . . .'

So promised Ian "Molly" Meldrum, recipient of the Australian Recording Industry Association's special achievement award on Wednesday night. Then he reeled off more than 50 names in one of the longest acceptance speeches in memory:

"Firstly I'd like to thank **Ronnie Burns** who first got me into this industry. His mum, **Auntie Edna**, was an inspiration back then, when we started the record production side. To **Phillip Frazier** and **Tony Schauble** at 'Go-Set' for asking me to be a rock writer. To **Roger Savage** and **Bill Armstrong** and engineers **John Sayers** and **Ernie Rose**, for teaching me how to become a record producer. To the artists like **Russell Morris, John Young** the song writer, **Master's Apprentices, Zoot, Ronnie Burns, Colleen Hewitt, The Ferrets, Supernaught, Indecent Obsession, Kids In The Kitchen** — for all allowing me to produce their records. To **TV Week**', who've allowed me to write for their magazine . . . to two of my dear friends, **Lawrie Masterson**, who I write with, and **Allan Webster**. To **Channel 10** for first asking me to be a mimer on 'Kommotion'. I can't mime and I can't talk properly yet. To **Uptight**, to **Ross D. Wylie** and to **Kevin Lewis** and to **Happening 76**. To **Channel 7** for letting me do the children's show and incorporating music into that. To **Ian Buchan** and **Gordon French** I thank you.

To **Channel 2**, to the **ABC** . . . the 13 years of 'Countdown' was a fantastic experience . . . to the producers, directors — **Robbie Weekes, Chris Noble, Ted Emery, Tony Blewitt** and **Grant Rule** — I thank them all. To **Channel 9**, to **Daryl** and the boys; I thank you very much. To **Daryl** and **Ernie**, to **David Leckie**, to **Ian Johnson** from Nine. To the crew, **Red** and **Willy, Russell, Andrew** and **John Blackman** and **Dickie Knee**.

Finally, I'd like to thank one man in particular, **Mr Michael Shrimpton** from the ABC, who was the man who got 'Countdown' on the air and fought for it for so many years. To all my friends and my family, to **Lyn** and **Christine** and people like that who've got me through a lot. To all the artists, both here and overseas who've had to put up with my form of ramblings, my criticisms, my everything.

And finally, I'd like to dedicate this award to my adopted son **Morgan**. To him and all the youth of Australia, that they may in the future have the same opportunities, and the same fun that I've had. I thank you very, very much."

HOW THEY KILLED MAXWELL

After a worldwide investigation, Kevin Cahill found that dissident Israeli secret service agents were behind the assassination of the British publishing tycoon.

ON 2 November 1991, three days before Robert Maxwell's body was found in the sea off the Canary Islands, a source close to the Israeli Cabinet told the American Pulitzer prize-winning writer Seymour Hersh that Maxwell was about to be eliminated.

Hersh did not know whether to believe the information. He had been involved in a dramatic confrontation with Maxwell over his book 'The Samson Option', only a month before.

This had led to libel writs against Hersh and his publishers and to the collapse of the share price of Maxwell's corporate flagship, the Mirror Group.

Unwittingly, Hersh had precipitated Maxwell's demise with a book principally about the creation of the Israeli atomic bomb, which was picked up by the British tabloid press because of its revelations about Maxwell's financial dealings.

What no one anticipated was the way the British press would seize on the Maxwell material in 'The Samson Option', and turn it into the affair that sparked the crisis that ended his business empire — and his life.

A former Israeli officer says that he passed on the information about Maxwell to Hersh because something in his informant's voice suggested that he was being deadly serious.

Hersh privately believes that Maxwell himself may have been tipped off and may have believed that he could escape immediate danger by putting to sea in his yacht, the Lady Ghislaine.

Maxwell had never had a personal bodyguard and had never paid much attention to his personal safety.

Two weeks before his death, Maxwell consulted Jules Kroll, head of a New York-based international detective agency, at the Helmsely Palace Hotel in New York. He told Kroll about the threats he thought he faced, standing on a window balcony so that they could not be eavesdropped.

Kroll also believes that Maxwell had been tipped off about a threat to his personal safety from disaffected Israeli intelligence officers who thought Israel's links with Maxwell were bad for the country.

Maxwell's response to the growing crisis was to go on a cruise in his 55-metre Lady Ghislaine, starting on 31 October from Gibraltar. The excuse he gave was that he had a cold.

The Israeli dissidents felt that it was Maxwell's fault they had been fired. He had borrowed large amounts of money over the years from Israeli funds and not paid it back.

The seeds of his downfall had been sown that night in London in 1984 when he handed Reed International chief executive Alex Jarratt a draft for $200 million to buy the mass circulation 'Daily Mirror' newspaper. He didn't have the money and it had all come from Israeli sources. It was never repaid.

The Israeli dissidents (the names of whom are witheld for legal reasons) went to Catania, in Sicily, to hire two mafia-connected contract killers. This was standard practice after many bungled killings in Europe by the Mossad secret service in the early '80s.

The two men (whose names must also be withheld for legal reasons) had done killings for Mossad before and were well known to the dissident officers. The Catania contract killers were given the impression that it was an official Mossad assignment. It is unlikely they would have taken it if they had known the truth.

The price for the murder was $1 million in cash, $500,000 down and the balance on completion. The killers were handed detailed descriptions of Maxwell's movements and his medical and psychological records.

Time was short. The reasoning was that Maxwell, 68, had to be killed before his business empire collapsed. He had to be prevented from making a public defence of his position, and perhaps carrying out the threats of exposure he had made against Israeli agents.

The timetable had also shrunk because of Hersh's allegations.

When Maxwell decided to go cruising on 31 October, he played into his killers' hands. Israeli intelligence was monitoring all Maxwell's international communications and knew his itinerary.

Captain Bob: Maxwell's decision to go cruising off Spain on the Lady Ghislaine as the crisis in his buiness empire mounted proved to be fatal.

Picture: AUSTRAL/SYGMA

The 12-metre motor cruiser used by the assassins, registered in Liberia but with Catania as her home port, left Catania on the night of 31 October, the same night Maxwell flew into Gibraltar in his Gulfstream 4 jet from Britain.

The killers left London and flew to Madeira during the next 24 hours to liaise with their boat. The Catanian boat arrived and took the killers aboard as the Lady Ghislaine docked at Madeira, an island off the Portuguese coast.

Throughout his life, Maxwell's activities had been monitored by a variety of intelligence agencies: Mossad, Britain's MI6, the KGB, the CIA and every other secret agency in the Eastern Bloc, often as a simple consequence of his high-level contacts in those countries.

On the night of 4 November, Maxwell made several phone calls via his satellite telephone — all of them easily monitored by the CIA in the Canaries, by a British outpost in Cyprus and by Mossad in Israel. They had monitored all calls and faxes to and from the boat in the five days it was at sea.

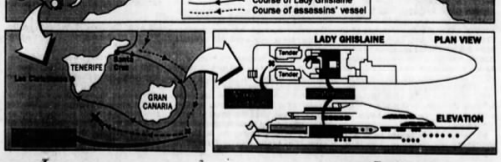
For three days, the Catanian yacht shadowed the Lady Ghislaine.

On the night of his death, Maxwell had gone to his stateroom about 10 pm. He made a series of phone calls, ending with one to his son, Ian, about 11 pm. The stateroom has access to the boat's after-deck via three different doors, with a narrow passageway past and between the two small emergency tenders.

The Catanian assassins, plus a helmsman and a doctor, left their boat in an inflatable dinghy and followed the Lady Ghislaine for almost six hours, waiting for Maxwell to come out on the after-deck.

If the death was to look accidental, it had to look like drowning, and Maxwell's bulk made it essential to minimise the distance he would have to be carried. If he were to be killed in his stateroom, there was a possibility of getting him jammed in a doorway. Few who have not been in the physical presence of Maxwell can appreciate his vast bulk.

On board the Lady Ghislaine, the crew of 11 consisted of two engineers on duty in the engine room, two men on watch on the bridge, and the captain, Augustus Rankin, asleep with the rest of the crew. The Lady Ghislaine was cruising slowly in a modest Atlantic swell, to the east of Gran Canaria island.



Around 4.25 am, Maxwell locked the door to the stateroom behind him, something he is never known to have done before, and began his fatal walk.

He emerged from the passageway between the two emergency tenders on to the after-deck. The assassins instantly moved in. One of the crew on the bridge had seen Maxwell emerge but gone back to his watch shortly before.

The killers slipped over the side of the dinghy in wet suits. Both were big men, specially chosen for the task. One carried a military cosh, the other a 20-millilitre syringe kit in a hard plastic container.

They went on board the Lady Ghislaine by the stern ladder. Maxwell had his back to them and was on the satellite phone, talking. Something alerted him and he half turned, stepping back towards the passageway between the tenders as he did so.

The knockout blow could not be delivered as intended and Maxwell stumbled. There were no screams, but he seemed to laugh as he fell back. The second assassin landed a blow to the side of his head. The military cosh is designed to leave minimal marking.

Maxwell slumped to the boards, across the exit from the passageway but with his feet on the after-deck. The second assassin knelt, removed the syringe from its case and injected a bubble of air into Maxwell's neck via his jugular vein.

This air bubble would quickly travel to his heart and kill him, giving the effect of a heart attack and making the chance of discovery virtually zero. It took just a few moments for Maxwell to die, his already damaged heart having been on the verge of a collapse for months.

To claim the second half of their fee, the killers had to provide evidence that Maxwell was dead, in case the body sank and vanished when it was thrown overboard.

The two men put a lifejacket on to the lifeless body and manoeuvred it down the stairwell, where they lowered it into the water. They towed the body back to their yacht — something that took them to the verge of daylight.

Maxwell was certified dead by the doctor, photographed, and eventually slid overboard into the sea again, when the frothing in the blood in his heart caused by the air injection had subsided. Rigor mortis was starting to set in. He had been laid on his back under the deck awning.

By then it was late morning and the boats were far apart, partly accounting for the strange location of the body in relation to the alleged course of the Lady Ghislaine.

For the killers, there was a risk that an autopsy would discover the tiny pinhole in the neck, and there was a futher risk that the seizure of the heart, and the bubbles formed in the blood from the air injection, which would be abnormal, would be detected.

Nothing could be done about either, other than to keep the body on the Catanian boat as long as possible, giving the bubbles time to disappear.

At this point fate, or something else, lent a helpful hand. There are two accounts of what time the Lady Ghislaine docked at Los Christianos on Tenerife. Some local people say that they saw the yacht there at 7 am. The captain says that he dropped anchor at 9.45 am.

At 11 am, a call came for Maxwell. By 11.10, the captain and a crew member had discovered that Maxwell was not in his stateroom. Ian Maxwell was told that he was missing, but the air-sea rescue services were not formally alerted until nearly 12.12 pm.

The body was finally spotted at 5 pm by fishermen and at 6.45 pm, at the end of a warm sunny day, a Super Puma helicopter of the Spanish Air-Sea Rescue Service began the process of winching the body out of the sea.

The 'Daily Mirror', with information ahead of every newspaper, used it to full advantage. Richard Stott, the editor, flew out a squad of reporters, who, together with misunderstandings between Spanish officials unused to the British media circus, and the natural problems of reporters not using their own language, caused endless confusion.

So although the central facts are quite extraordinary, they have never been written before.

The Spanish autopsy team, three eminent local specialists led by Dr Carlos Lopez de Lamela, a veteran of

➡ Continued AGENDA 2

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